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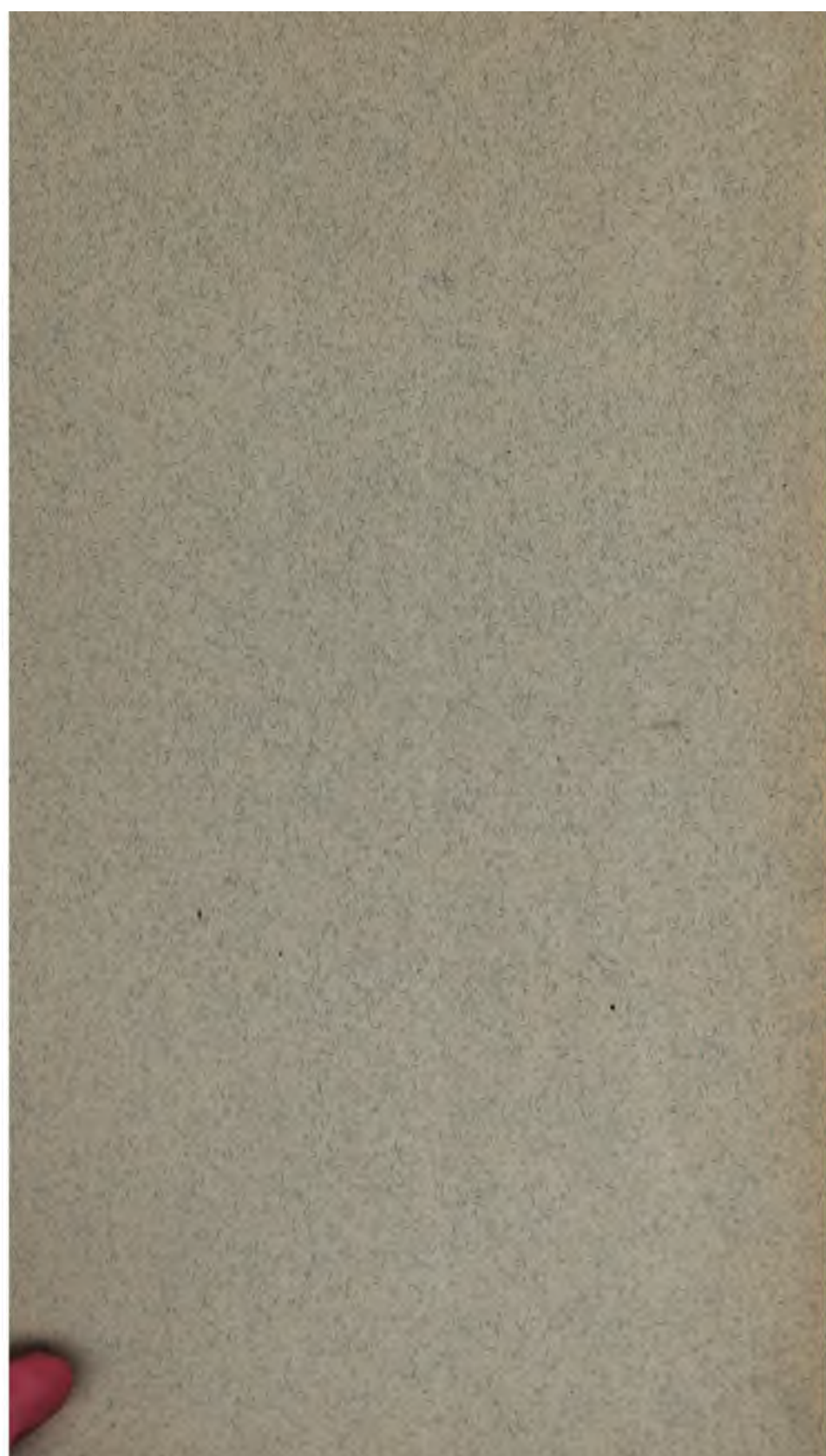
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A BRIEF HISTORICAL SKETCH  
OF THE  
SUFFOLK NORTH CONFERENCE  
OF  
CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES.

BY  
ISAAC P. LANGWORTHY, D.D.  
CHELSEA.

1861-1886.

BOSTON:  
ALFRED MUDGE & SON, PRINTERS,  
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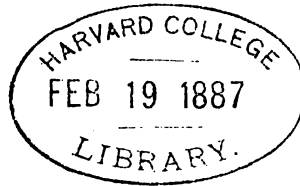
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*The Author*

THE following sketch was written by request, and delivered at the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Suffolk North Congregational Conference, held in the First Church, Charlestown, October 13, 1886, and is published by the unanimous vote of the Conference.

A BRIEF HISTORICAL SKETCH  
OF THE  
SUFFOLK NORTH CONFERENCE  
OF  
CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES.  
1861-1886.

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You ask for a brief narrative of the items of chief interest connected with the origin and progress of this Suffolk North Conference of Congregational Churches. Annals would be repetitious, hence tedious. And as no very striking, startling, or surprising events have occurred, during our twenty-five years of associated life, to grace or spice my little story, I must content myself with giving you a simple statement of a few facts as they have developed in our work. But let me premise that no one is responsible for any conclusions, or inferences, or opinions that may be suggested but the writer himself.

**And now as to our origin.** It is within my distinct recollection that long before any organized action was taken, there were frequent interviews between some of the pastors of Boston and vicinity upon the great need of more social, intimate religious intercourse and union between the different churches, and between pastors and people of individual churches in reference to a



more decided, more widely extended and aggressive Christian influence within *our* borders. At the first, and for a number of years, indeed, there seemed to be little prospect of such harmony of views as to justify any attempt at combined action. But the more it was considered, and especially from the apparent certainty that two or more churches would unite and hold a day's meeting, if not longer, once or twice a year, alternating, the impression became more general that something must be done.

The first united action which took form, so far as there is any record, was at a meeting held in Old South Chapel, Nov. 1, 1860. But by whom called, and attended, and what was done in detail, we have no means of knowing. This, however, is in evidence, that a committee was appointed to do something in reference to the formation of two conferences within the limits of Suffolk North and South Associations, as will appear further along.

The next step recorded is of a meeting in Central Church, Boston, Feb. 13, 1861, of the churches under the pastoral care of the ministers of the Suffolk North and South Associations. At this meeting a committee was appointed, consisting of the Rev. George W. Blagden, Rev. Nehemiah Adams, Wm. J. Hubbard, Esq., and Deacon James W. Kimball, to address a letter to the several churches within the limits of these associations.

This letter was adopted by apparently an adjourned meeting of this body, five days later, viz., Feb. 18, the purport of which may be seen from the following ex-

tract: "That it is desirable for the Trinitarian Congregational churches of this city and adjacent towns to unite in a conference, which shall meet by pastors and delegates appointed by the churches, semi-annually, in the months of April and November, or at such other times as the conference shall appoint, for the purpose of prayer and consultation with reference to our greater union and efficiency in advancing the kingdom of our common Lord." It then invites the church addressed to be represented by pastor and delegate at a meeting to be held the 17th of April, 1861, in the Old South Chapel, "at a quarter past three o'clock in the afternoon," when it was supposed definite action would be taken. Said meeting was held, the Rev. J. A. Albro was moderator, and the Rev. A. H. Plumb, scribe. Both the North and the South Associations were largely represented; and the question of one, two, or three conferences was warmly and earnestly discussed. The motions for one and three were negatived. Finally it was voted, "That it is expedient, in the judgment of this meeting, that the committee appointed at the conference, of which the Rev. S. R. Dennen was secretary (held in Old South Chapel, Nov. 1, 1860, just alluded to), should proceed to carry out the instruction under which they were appointed, viz., to complete the arrangement for the formation of two conferences." Of whom this committee consisted we have no knowledge.

This committee, however, invited all the churches of Suffolk North Association to a meeting in Old South Chapel, May 16, 1861. Twelve churches were repre-

sented, six ministers and thirteen brethren, only four pastors. After prayer and due deliberation, a committee was appointed, consisting of the Reys. G. W. Blagden, and A. H. Plumb, with Deacon Julius A. Palmer and Sam'l H. Walley, Esq., to report a plan of organization of "The Suffolk North Conference of Congregational Churches." This meeting adjourned to May 23, 1861, when the plan was reported, discussed, and with some modifications was adopted.

Nov. 6, 1861, the first regular meeting was held in Mount Vernon Church, when it may be said our little craft was launched and put upon its voyage to the better land. Sixteen churches were represented; thirteen by pastors, and two of the delegates were ministers, and they — the Rev. Asa Bullard and the writer — are the only ministers now living who were at the formation of this conference and are still active members. The pastor and good people of Mount Vernon Church gave us a warm and cordial reception, and furnished a bountiful collation, though many deemed that utterly out of the question because of the large numbers in attendance, — a custom, however, ever since followed.

The order of services was quite similar to that now pursued. There was always a welcome given to the conference by the pastor or a senior officer of the receiving church at the opening of the services, which, to many, seemed every way fitting, as it helped to put the members more at their ease, giving a home feeling that was pleasant to enjoy. To some of us there seems to be no good reason for its omission in these later days.

The constitution has been changed in one or two particulars, but in its essential features remains as at the beginning. An effort was made, with considerable persistence, to open the way for the regular presentation of our various benevolences; but after discussion upon an elaborate report it was decided that the first and chief object of the conference would not be subserved by such a course.

**Now as to the churches.** There have been some changes. Old South, Boston, Old South, Reading, the Waltham and Medford churches, from personal preferences or convenience in attendance, have withdrawn from our conference. Bowdoin Street and Salem churches, Boston, and the Evangelical Church of East Cambridge have disbanded. One church in Cambridgeport — the Stearns Chapel — does not appear in our minutes. Pilgrim and Wood Memorial date their organizations at 1865 and 1884; and it is supposed, absorbed more or less of the membership of the disappearing church in name. So that Cambridge entire reported five churches in 1861 and reports only five now; but the membership is greatly increased. In 1861 the five churches reported 989 members; and in 1886, 2,077. Chelsea had two churches in 1861, with an aggregate membership of 575; and now has three churches, with a membership of 1,208. North Chelsea, now Revere, had but a handful in 1861, and only 33 members; now has a double handful, viz., two churches and 127 members. But Somerville shows the most pleasing increase. In 1861 there was but one church with only 135 members. Now

there are five churches with an aggregate membership of 1,150,—more than eight and a half times larger than in the beginning of the quarter of a century now closing, and doubling the ratio of the increase of its rapidly growing population.

Of the 21 churches now embraced within our conference only two have a less membership than twenty-five years ago. Owing to removals, Mount Vernon Church reports 145, and the First Church, Charlestown, 88 less than at the organization of this conference.

On commencing my research for the statements herewith presented, I was happy in finding our twenty-one associated churches well supplied with pastors. But now a single exception must be recorded, viz., that of the North Avenue Church of Cambridge. There can be but one feeling here, and that of deep regret, that its young, able, and successful pastor for the seven years past feels called of God to another highly important field, to which he will go, assured of our tender, loving regards, and of prayers for still richer blessings upon his labors.

The Sabbath school has always held a warm place in the regards and services of our conference. The constitution was early changed to make the superintendent *ex-officio* a member of the conference; and the schools have been generally represented.

**Of the pastors a very few words.** Not one is now in the church he represented at the organization of our conference. Here and there one holds similar relations to other churches, but numbers of them have passed on,



the fragrance of whose memory we gladly cherish. Many of you recall the graceful and cordial "How do you do?" and the hearty hand-shaking of Dr. Blagden, of the Old South Church, Boston, a gentleman, a Christian gentleman, often with us ; so conservative on the questions of slavery and total abstinence as to lean the other way ; and while self-assured, he was very polite. In writing his sermons, he used more ink to express his ideas than many, theologically sound on the old standard, and an earnest preacher.

Dr. Albro, of Cambridge, was very social, pleasant, and companionable ; an omnivorous reader, some saying of him, in his later days, that he had read more books in Harvard library than any other man ; a good preacher, more instructive than exciting ; beloved by his church.

Dr. Stearns, of Cambridgeport, was naturally more reserved than his neighbor just named ; scholarly, self-poised, even in excited discussion ; making a good record as both pastor and preacher ; but left us early in our history to be the able and successful president of Amherst College.

Dr. Copp, of Chelsea, was a thoroughly kind and good man, pre-eminently a peacemaker. It cannot be said of him as one of his deacons once said of another doctor of divinity, viz., that "He would tell a white lie for the sake of peace." Not so, Dr. Copp, indeed ; but in any sharp differences upon pending topics, he was always ready with a skilfully prepared compromise to prevent division and bring conflicting parties into harmony. The seventh beatitude is surely his.

Dr. Miles, of Charlestown, had an unusually fine literary taste, carefully cultured and largely gratified. The extent of his acquisitions was not always, if ever, apparent in his sermons, having too much to run freely in public discourse; though beloved by his people, he left them to perform an excellent work as secretary of the American Peace Society.

Dr. Kirk, of Boston, was always at the front in every movement for progress. Revival work was his delight; and it may in truth be said he was more distinguished in the practical, stirring, and personal preaching than in the metaphysical and doctrinal. He was an exceedingly genial and agreeable companion; and his conversational powers were rarely surpassed.

Good Brother Cady, of Arlington, in looks, manners, spirit, conversation, and general bearing always reminded me of what I have supposed the Apostle John was, more than any other man whom it was my pleasure ever to know.

But there were other dearly beloved ministerial brethren who came in later, and were with us for a little season, active and faithful, leaving only pleasant recollections, but have entered upon their rest.

You will recall Dyer, and Kendall, and Dow, and Bean, and Packard, who did a good work, each in his own church, and have gone to their precious reward.

And who does not remember good Capt. Bartlett, an acceptable lay preacher in behalf of seamen, often present and always ready to speak, or pray, or sing, and always so as to be gladly heard?

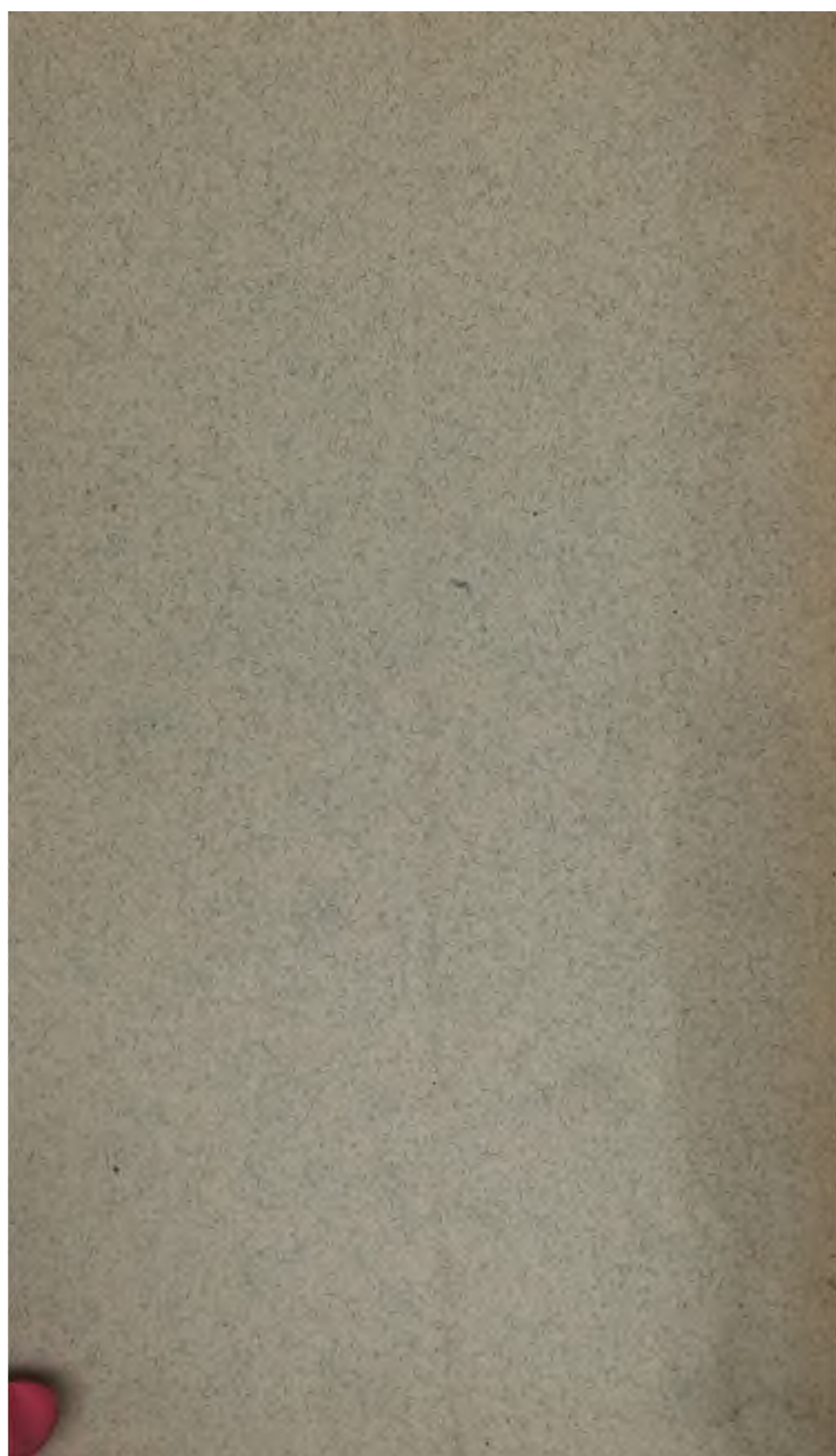
Much could be truthfully said of the interest taken in our conference by the good deacons and other faithful men and women of our churches, in its conception and its semi-annual meetings, but who have finished their work and rest from their labors. You recall at once the able and reliable deacons, Palmer, and Scudder, and Lothrop, and Kimball, and Stoddard, and Hubbard, of Boston; and Homer and Farwell, of Cambridge; and Pierce, of Charlestown; and Campbell and Cheever, of Chelsea, very often representing their own churches, and their simple presence was a benediction. And Deacon John Field seems almost an exceptional case. He was present as delegate from the church at West Cambridge, now Arlington, twelve times in seventeen consecutive meetings between the fourth and twentieth, modest, quiet, never speaking unless he had something to say, always on the right side, presiding once, at least, and on more committees than any other member for that entire period.

Taken all in all, there is much to recall with gratitude in our little history for the quarter of a century now closed. There has been creditable progress in our churches, though not all that might have been hoped for. Possibly the dominant feeling in our meetings in the earlier part of our history was more earnest in the line of revivals than in these later years. Certainly, the additions to our churches have not been in the ratio of the increase of our population, taking our whole field. There is ample room and a loud call for more faith, *illustrated* by fitting Christian work. Nearly all of our churches are situated in grow-

ing communities. If the strength of a church is measured by these three elements, viz., its *members*, their *resources* and *divine grace*, then our churches are in the midst of the very materials for strong churches, if now weak ; of stronger churches, if now strong. Only have the entire membership, no exempts, be a committee of the whole on ways and means, each seeking and seizing the favored moment, the assurance is doubly sure that the next twenty-five years will be abundantly more fruitful in bringing souls to Christ in this our ripening harvest than these have been now under review. For such a consummation, we will pray and labor and hope, — the Holy Spirit our helper !







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